

The Prince George's Post



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Coalition Counteracts Talk of Lowering Drinking Age

Statistics Say 21 Proves to be Reasonable Age for Alcohol Consumption

By MICHAEL WALSH
Capital News Service

WASHINGTON — Upper Marlboro native Jan Withers may have lost her 15-year-old daughter, Alisa, to underage drunken driving, but she still stands behind a report that 25,000 lives have been saved by keeping the minimum age for drinking alcohol at 21.

Withers spoke at a news conference announcing the Support 21 campaign, aimed at preserving a law "proven to save teenagers' lives," said Mark V. Rosenker of the National Transportation Safety Board.

Wither's daughter was killed in April 1992 after the car she was in hit a guardrail at around 100 mph and ejected her into a forest. The driver of the car

was 17 and had been drinking.

"It haunts me to think about the pain she felt at that time," said Withers, standing in front a picture of Alisa.

This time of year reminds Withers of her daughter, an accomplished ballerina who was then preparing for the Washington Ballet's performance of "The Nutcracker."

"She was joy in motion," Withers said.

The Support 21 campaign was born to counteract criticism of the minimum drinking age. Critics charge that soldiers old enough to fight and die in Iraq, for example, should be able to have a beer when they return home. The campaign is sponsored by NTSB, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the American Medical Association and the Insurance Institute



COURTESY JAN WITHERS
Alisa Withers, center, with her mother, Jan Withers, and brother, Kevin, left, and Jennifer, right.

for Highway Safety.

That "superficial debate" over drinking ages in the media prompted Support 21, said MADD Chief Executive Officer Charles Hurley.

"If there's going to be a debate, we want it to be an informed debate," Hurley

See DRINKING, Page A7

County Wins Award for Road Programs

Courtesy NACo

WASHINGTON — The National Association of Counties (NACo) named Prince George's County one of 10 recipients of its prestigious 2006-2007 Center for Sustainable Communities Awards.

The awards, presented every two years by NACo's Center for Sustainable Communities, recognize the most effective and innovative county-led partnerships with private sector, other governments or community groups in developing economically prosperous, environmentally safe, and socially equitable communities.

The county was honored for its Low Impact Development/Green Highway programs with the Maryland State Highway Administration.

Honorees will receive their awards during a reception this winter in Washington, D.C.

"I commend everyone who was involved in developing these outstanding community partnerships," said NACo President Eric Coleman, commissioner, Oakland County, Mich. "It is our hope that the national awards will spotlight your communities' great achievements and inspire others across the country to explore similar strategies to develop vibrant and sustainable communities."

NACo said the county and the Maryland State Highway Administration implemented cutting-edge activities promoting the practices of Low Impact Development (LID) and Green Highways that highlight the best in sustainable development

See COUNTY, Page A7

Suitland High Graduation Rate Rose to 88.3 Percent in 2006

Jackson Urges Suitland High School Students to Stay in School



By RICK DOCKSAI
Capital News Service

FORESTVILLE — Citing statistics that black students are three times more likely than whites to be expelled from school, the Rev. Jesse Jackson urged Suitland High School students to commit to school.

"We have no control over our date of birth or our race or our gender," Jackson said at the

school, whose student body is 97 percent black. "But we have control over the choices we make."

Recalling the fight by black children to integrate the white schools in then-segregated Little Rock, Ark., Jackson castigated students today who skip school or drop out altogether.

"Today, there are no howling mobs outside the doors. There are no governors blocking

the doors. So why are we not attending school?" he asked.

A Chicago Tribune analysis of U.S. Department of Education data concluded last month that black students nationwide are three times more likely to be expelled than white students who commit the same offenses. It said the disparity rose immensely in some states — black students in New Jersey were 60 times as likely to be

expelled as whites.

Jackson said he chose Suitland High School because of the progress the school is making in improving student performance. Suitland is one of seven schools that the state removed last year from its list of "schools identified for improvement," because of increases in their state assessment tests.

At Suitland, for example, the graduation rate rose to 88.3

percent in 2006, according to county statistics, above the 2006 statewide rate of 85.4 percent.

But attendance at Suitland is still an issue. Attendance at the school dropped from 88.6 percent in 2005 to 85.2 percent in 2006, according to a county performance report, compared to statewide averages of 92 percent in 2005 and 91.6 percent in

See JACKSON, Page A7

Theft Of Air Bags Costly Problems, Life Threatening

Local Areas Tackle Rising Thefts, Auto Club Offers Theft Prevention Tips

Courtesy AAA

WASHINGTON — With the rise in thefts of Global Positioning Devices across the country, metro area motorists are once again facing an old enemy when trying to protect their cars from being vandalized. Air bags are being ripped out of cars, and driving without them can jeopardize your life and the safety and lives of your right-front passengers, warns AAA Mid-Atlantic.

Because they are costly, and retail for \$1,000, frontal airbags remain one of the primary targets of thieves, who

are reaching into their old bag of tricks and stealing airbags in large numbers. In fact, thousands of airbags are stolen each across the nation and crooks have turned it into a multi-million dollar business. It is also gaining a toehold in the metro region, notes AAA Mid-Atlantic.

"Although they are considered supplemental safety devices, airbags are installed for one overarching safety purpose: to reduce injuries and to save lives during an auto crash," says Gregory W. Stardard, AAA Mid-Atlantic public and government affairs

Anti-Theft Airbag Tips

- Air bag thieves don't like witnesses. Park your car in public areas or in well lit areas.
- Avoid leaving your car in an unattended parking lot for an extended period of time.
- Lock all doors and roll up all windows.
- Don't make your car a desirable target for thieves. Don't leave possessions in plain sight.
- If your air bag has deployed because you've been in a car accident, it's important to make sure one of these "hot airbags" doesn't end up in your car. Only a factory-fresh bag will guarantee the bag will work, and help prevent you from getting injured or killed in a traffic mishap.

—AAA Mid-Atlantic

specialist. "The federal government estimates that airbags have saved 13,967 lives in the period between 1987 and 2003."

Motorists who don't have airbags face an extreme risk if

See THEFT, Page A7

Battlefield Bear

BEAR Robot Generates Buzz, Snickers, But May Save Lives

By DAN LAMOTHE
Capital News Service

COLLEGE PARK — What costs as much as a luxury vehicle, has cute, rounded ears and generates punch lines for late night comedians?

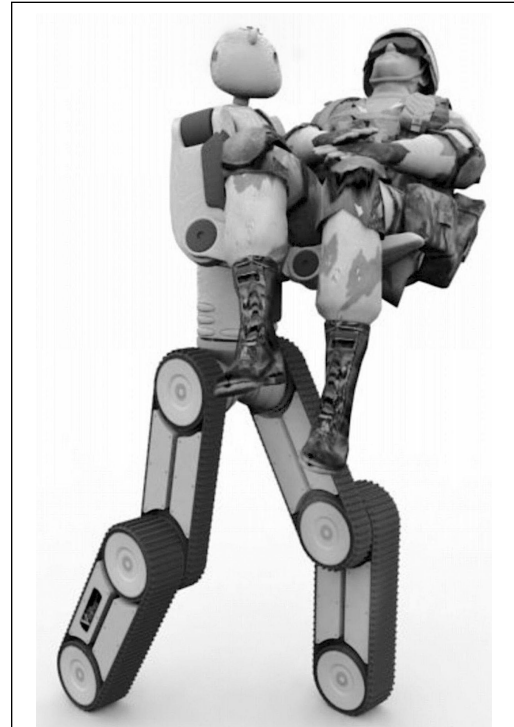
A quirky robot developed by a Maryland company that may one day save lives.

Vecna Technologies Inc., of College Park, began developing the Battlefield Extraction-Assist Robot in the late 1990s, but it has recently received a flurry of attention, with everyone from CNN to the BBC featured the project.

It was an offbeat June segment on Comedy Central's "The Colbert Report" that amused the company's owners, though. Playing off the robot's bear-shaped head and ears, political satirist Stephen Colbert called it "the No. 1 threat facing America," spawning jokes on dozens of blogs and Web sites.

Daniel Theobald, company president, said he

See BATTLEFIELD BEAR, Page A7



Aquasco Family Receives Farming Award From Governor

By GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

ANNAPOLIS — The family and owners of Villa de Alpacas Farm in Aquasco, Md., received the Bi-Centennial Farm designation.

The family was honored recently by state Gov. Martin O'Malley, who praised them for their long term commitment to

farming and leadership in preserving agricultural land in Maryland.

Since the program began in 1994, 134 farms — about one percent of the state's 12,000 farms — have received the Century Farm designation and four of those have received the Bi-Centennial Farm designation.

"Maryland farmers are the backbone of our economy. The Century Farm families we honor have played a significant role in making agriculture a leading industry in Maryland," said Gov. O'Malley.

"I am committed to working with the entire farm community to keep farming sustain-

See FAMILY, Page A7

INSIDE



PHOTO GETTY IMAGES

COMMENTARY

Large Trucks Harm Environment

They're big and contribute to soot, smog-causing pollution and global warming.

A4

NEIGHBORS

Eyeglass Donation Box Spruced Up
The Upper Marlboro Lions Club is having its eyeglass drop-off box repainted.

A2

COMMUNITY

New Fire House for District Heights

Construction on a new state-of-the-art fire station slated to be finished in 10 months.

A3

Towns and NEIGHBORS

Brandywine-Aquasco

By RUTH TURNER
301.888.1139

Katrina Relief

A fall harvest day will take place from 1 p.m. until dusk, Saturday, Oct. 20, at Brookfield UMC, 12806 Croom Road, Upper Marlboro. The event is sponsored by community United Methodist churches, (Brookfield, Immanuel, Christ and Nottingham-Myers). Hayrides, games, food, bonfire, family fun and miniature horses. Cost is \$10 per person. Children will be admitted free. Proceeds benefit Katrina Relief Activities. 301-579-6565.

Volunteers in Mission

Join a team when they depart Saturday, Jan. 5, 2008, and return on Sunday, Jan. 13. The team will work Monday through Friday. The Katrina Relief Trip to Biloxi, Miss., is sponsored by Community United Methodist churches, (Brookfield, Immanuel, Christ

and Nottingham-Myers). Proceeds benefit Katrina Relief Activities.

Call Eldon Baldwin, team leader, at 301-888-1546.

Prince George's Community College

The college will present its 49th annual Art Faculty Exhibition from Oct. 15 to Nov. 8. A reception will take place from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Nov. 2. The exhibition will be closed Tuesday, Oct. 30, for College Enrichment Day. Exhibition closes at noon on the final day.

Toby's Dinner Theater

Members of the four BICNoM churches are invited on a holiday outing to Toby's Dinner Theater, Saturday, Dec. 1. The show is "Sound of Music," and doors open at 6 p.m. The charge for dinner and the show is \$85 per couple or \$42.50 per person. Free bus transportation provided with

stops at Immanuel and Brookfield.

Call Emma Moreno at 301-627-1667 or e-mail her at probe858@aol.com with your reservation. Payment deadline is Oct. 15.

Nottingham-Myers Bermuda Cruise

Senior ministry coordinators of Nottingham-Myers U.M.C. are sponsoring a cruise to Bermuda on May 24 to 29. There is space available for a limited time if anyone is interested. Everyone must have a passport for this cruise. Call the church at 301-888-2171.

Health Tidbit

If you ever have experienced floaters - small medium or large black spots moving across one or both eyes - do not ignore them or think they will disappear. Floaters can be serious. Call your doctor for an appointment right away.

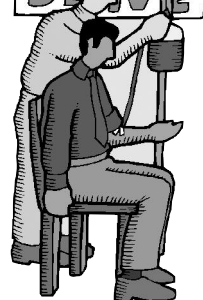
Lions Eyeglass Box Getting Makeover



The gold and purple donated eyeglass collection box across the street from the Prince George's County Courthouse on Pratt Street is getting a makeover. The drop-off box is owned and operated by the Lions Club of Upper Marlboro.

Thanks to Jose Pena, service manager at Marlboro Auto Body, and his staff, the collection box will be repainted the Lions Club colors - gold and purple. As soon as the project is complete, and the paint dry, the box will be returned to its original site.

The Lions Club provides donated and used eyeglasses to children and adults. More than 5,000 pairs of such eyeglasses have been dropped off at the box since it was placed in Upper Marlboro a few years ago. Members of the community are encouraged to recycle their old eyeglasses by using the drop off site.



In other Lions business, the club will hold its annual Red Cross Bloodmobile from 3 to 7:30 p.m., Thursday, Nov. 15, at the Upper Marlboro Volunteer Fire Department. Club members thank the department for allowing them to use the space and for their community work.

Clinton Conversations

By NORMA FAZENBAKER
301.579.6116

- Sixteen members of the Class of 1940, Connellsville High School, showed up this year for our class get-together, which are double those who came last year. It was a great time, and I know that those of you who have been going to reunions understand what I mean. The weather was perfect for my trip and this time, three of my daughters joined me, so it was especially great for me.

- An exclusive eWomenNetwork "Accelerated Luncheon" will be held on Oct.

24 at Maggiano's with the subject "Staying Viable in Today's Marketplace." You will learn how to maintain perspective, how to grow or how to die, and how to graciously implement change with Trudy Simmons. Simmons is president of Degage, an upscale retail-decorating site in McLean. She has multiple degrees in Fine Arts and Interior Design. She will speak on the importance of keeping the fire within turning to grow the country's economy, one entrepreneur at a time. If you are interested in attending this seminar, call 877-343-2145.

- On Oct. 1, the Centers for

Medicare and Medicaid announced the Medicare Part B premium would rise to \$96.40 per month effective January 2008 from the current \$93.50. The annual Part B deductible will also increase from \$131 to \$135. Part A deductible for the first 60 days as a hospital inpatient will increase from the present \$992 to \$1,024. More information can be found on the NARFE website.

The percentage of Africa that is wilderness is 28 percent and the percentage of North America that is wilderness is 38 percent.

Serving Suitland

By JANICE A. EUELL
301.736.3481

As you shop, work, pray and play in Suitland, you will see a sign at the corner of Suitland and Silver Hill roads that reads "Great Things Are Happening in Suitland." And, truer words have not been spoken. In fact, so many things are changing that I fully expect that in the next five years, you won't believe your eyes.

I'm sure you read that Kevin Sills is spearheading an \$800 million renovation/revitalization project for our community that

will surely alter its infrastructure. In addition, the Department of Housing and Community Development has chosen a developer to revamp the Suitland Manor complex where old apartment buildings continue to be demolished. Although this issue is clouded by the choice of a developer, that did not mirror the choice made by members of our Suitland Civic Association. When the dust finally settles, we will have a company that will take our desires for change into consideration. In order for your voice to be heard about the developer, you should attend the next meeting of the Suitland Civic Association to get details and share your opinions.

But more important than the brick and mortar changes, the residents of our community are coming together to help themselves and others. Drew/Freeman Middle School has, as I already informed you, been selected as an America's Choice school, which brings much needed human and tangible resources to the school to aid in its progression toward meeting its performance standards of the next year. Businesses, churches, law enforcement, community service groups and politicians are coming together to provide incentives for students to excel in reading and math.

Hunter Memorial AME Church in Suitland is doing great things by bringing the communi-

ty into the church to participate in activities, programs and services. Pastor Harold B. Hayes is to be congratulated and appreciated for his humanitarian efforts in providing resources for youth in ROJA's After School Learning Centers. Carol Jones, the church's finance officer, volunteers along with her daughter Tamika at the Parkland Village After School Center and also provides resources for the center. Nina Green, of AngChild Tutoring Services, has brought supplies, books and other resources to the Parkway Terrace After School Learning Center for their use. Sheena Blake, a devoted parent and friend, is also helping out at the Parkland Center. Visits from members of the Ronald E. McNair Masonic Lodge No. 146 and helping hands from the Roscoe L. Cartwright Masonic Lodge in Accokeek have provided free trips and other youth activities. These are the soldiers who will help us win the battle of stabilizing youth behavior that, in terms of importance, ranks alongside their academic achievement to result in youth who are productive members of society and responsible adults.

All of these things, when combined, will make our community a model that shows what positive accomplishments are possible when people work together. Keep up the good work Suitlanders.

In and Around Morningside Skyline

By MARY MCHALE
301.735.3451

Morningside Fire Department Honors 4-Year-Old

Alarmed because his grandmother was coughing and having trouble breathing, four-year-old Shawn Armwood called his mother. She urged him to dial 911. He did, and within minutes Morningside responded with an ambulance and started 51-year-old Kathleen Allen on oxygen.

As his grandmother told me, Shawn was so calm when he called 911, "you'd have thought he was 10."

Mrs. Allen was taken to Southern Maryland Hospital, where an EKG and other tests showed that she had had a mild heart attack. She has suffered from angina and other heart problems since 1996.

She is so proud of Shawn, a pre-kindergarten student at Morningside School that she had a star-shaped award engraved for him with the words, "Shawn Armwood Jr., My Hero, for calling 911 on September 12, 2007." Deputy Fire Chief Mike White presented it to him during an open house at Morningside Fire Department last Saturday.

Also, Shawn's great-grandmother, Alma Savage, gave him a teddy bear with a poem, and his great-aunt, Yvonne Brown, awarded him an angel pin with a prayer. Kathleen and Frank Allen and their daughter Althea and her husband Shawn Armwood have lived on Woodland Road in Morningside for 15 years.

Neighbors

- Father Frank Desiderio said Mass for about a hundred

Desiderio relatives at St. Philip's on Oct. 6, in celebration of his 25 years in the priesthood. A graduate of St. Philip's School and McNamara High School, he is an associate priest for Corpus Christi Parish in Pacific Palisades, Calif., and president of Paulist Productions, which produces movies and documentaries for television. He is currently working with Hallmark Hall of Fame on an upcoming movie-of-the-week project.

- Ruth and George Hoehl, of Clinton, are on their way home from Shanghai, China, where their daughter Christine competed on the Team USA5 Bocce Team, which took 3rd place in the Special Olympics Summer Games. Congratulations Christine.

- Agnes Koch, now in her 90s, was back in town Oct. 2 for a reunion with friends at the Old Country Buffet. She lived in Morningside and then in Suitland before Florida and now Bothell, Wash. She has managed for more than 60 years to keep in touch with Morningside neighbors and friends and fellow members of the District Heights Homemakers. Her daughter Julie, a graduate of Suitland High, was also in town from Bothell, but didn't make the lunch.

- Maybe you've seen "The Bible Man" (my coinage) walking along Allentown Road holding aloft a Bible. I've noticed him a lot lately. He occasionally directs traffic at the intersection of Allentown and Suitland Road. One day, several years ago, I met him at McDonald's and asked his name. He pulled out his driver's license and let me read it. His first name is Maurice. I asked why

he travels the streets—he is seen in other neighborhoods, too—with his Bible. He said he wants everyone to know that God is in charge. Wave when you see him.

(By the way, he never asks for money.)

Bells Extends Invitation

Bells United Methodist Church is having a Home Coming Celebration on Sunday at its 10:30 a.m. worship service. A visiting choir will sing, and past pastors have been invited to take part in the service. Current pastor Rev. Gerald Elston will preach. Lunch will be served. Call Edna Holland at 301-735-1167 to make luncheon reservations.

Bells is also hosting the School of Christian Growth on Wednesdays, 7 to 9:15 p.m. through the end of October. There are classes on lay speaking, the Book of Acts and a couple of classes about the Methodist Church. Call the church office, 301-899-7521, for more information.

Do It for Your Health

Be part of Make a Difference Day and participate in a 5K run/walk on Saturday at Watkins Regional Park. The site is accessible with an asphalt-paved scenic trail. On-site registration begins at 8:30 a.m. The first 300 people to register will receive a gift.

Also on hand will be the M-NCPPC Skate Mobile, information about the Positive Path-ways Pre-Teen program, hand dance demonstrations and healthy lifestyle information. They're asking for donations of new or gently used children's scarves,

hats, mittens or gloves to help families in need. Make a difference to our community and to your own health and fitness.

May They Rest in Peace

- Annie Jean Massey, who retired from the Prince George's Library System in 2005, died at her home on Meadowbrook Drive in Suitland on Oct. 9. She was a graduate of Johnson C. Smith University, in North Carolina, and had a master's from the University of Maryland. At Ebenezer AME Church in Fort Washington, she was in the Daughters of Anna, the Chancellor Choir and the Bible Institute.

Survivors include her husband Marion; two sons; two daughters; and several siblings.

- David R. Watts, 73, a custom homebuilder in Prince George's, died Oct. 5. He lived in Brandywine where, along with his wife Cheryl, he owned and operated the Ice Cream Factory & Cafe Restaurant.

In addition to his wife, he is survived by two children, Steve Watts and Laura Johnson; and four grandchildren. His first wife, Dolores, died in 1999 and daughter Constance in 1972.

Milestones

- Happy birthday to Paul Long, Andrew Nicholas Smith, Carol Kline DeGraba and Nola Cook, Oct. 18; Vera Chaney and Ernest Pruitt, Oct. 19; Catherine Alvis and Mary Koslak, Oct. 22; Jane Wright, Oct. 23; and Daniel John Fitzgerald, Oct. 24.

- Happy 27th anniversary to Michael and Anita (Fulton) Freeman on Oct. 18, and to Margaret and Phil Rollins, their 61st on Oct. 19.

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COMMUNITY

Groundbreaking Held for New District Heights Fire Station

Courtesy **DEMENTOF**

Civic and community leaders gathered last week with citizens and residents at a ceremonial groundbreaking event for a state-of-the-art Community Fire/EMS Station in District Heights.

Station 26 will be constructed on a parcel of land on Marlboro Pike near Silver Hill Road. The new station will house the existing District Heights Fire Station, which was built by volunteer firefighters more than 50 years ago.

Prince George's County Fire Chief Lawrence H.

Sedgwick said, "Since the beginnings of the fire service in America, the fire station has been a hub of the activities for the community. A safe haven in times of trouble, and a place to turn to for help of any kind. When finished, this station will blend well in to this community both esthetically and functionally, and we hope it will become an integral part of this community, enhancing the role the current District Heights station plays in its community today."

Tom Stommel, volunteer chief, District Heights Volunteer Fire Department,



COURTESY PGC FIRE/EMS
Fire and elected officials break ground for a new fire station in District Heights, which will be located on Marlboro Pike.

said, "The existing fire station has served the community extremely well over the past

50 plus years, I only hope that the new station will serve the community as well."

The new District Heights Community Fire/EMS Station will feature four drive-through engine bays, sized for modern equipment needs, with ample space for two fire engines, a ladder truck, an ambulance and two supervisory chief response vehicles.

Interior features include state-of-the-art educational, meeting and conference areas and comfortable workspace for the volunteer and career personnel who will staff the facility. Creature comforts for the workforce, as well as employee health and safety, were paramount con-

cerns that will be witnessed in many of the design features, including the vehicle exhaust evacuation systems, physical fitness equipment, and more "cardiac-friendly" station alerting systems.

This facility includes numerous environmentally-sensitive design features, including energy efficient heating and ventilation systems, abundant green spaces, tree conservation planning, materials that emit lower levels of volatile organic compounds, energy efficient roofing, and glass and state-of-the-art controllability of lighting and thermal systems.

Fright Fest: Tasty Eats, Sweet Treats and Spooktacular Family Fun at Six Flags

Courtesy **SIX FLAGS**

BOWIE – With Halloween just around the corner, Six Flags America announces all the frightful attractions for Fright Fest 2007. "Thrills by Day, Chills by Night," Fright Fest offers fantastic, family-friendly Halloween attractions by day and chilling, scary fun by night.

Fright Fest continues to run Oct. 22 to 23 and 26 to 28 and gives guests plenty to scream about. Below are some of the attractions thrill seekers can expect:

- **Wheel of Fright and Coffin of Fear:** The Wheel of Fright is run by none-other than Dr. Fright. This attraction allows guests to eat their way to the front of the line. Courageous volunteers who opt to take a spin of the wheel will have to chow

down on whatever gruesome treats – wax worms, crickets, night crawlers, Rocky Mountain oysters and hot-hot-hot Habanero peppers (all known as a delicacy in parts of the world) – in which their spin lands. If they complete the task, they will be granted front of the line access passes (and other prizes) for some of the most popular rides or the park's Frightorium haunted house. As a grand finale, volunteers who have completed their task on The Wheel will then be put in a drawing to compete in the Coffin of Fear where one lucky guest must remain in a meal-wormy coffin for at least one minute in front of the audience. Wheel of Fright and Coffin of Fear are open to all guests. If younger than 18, minors must have parents sign a

waiver to participate.

- **Frightorium:** Travel through an abandoned residence where spirits remain and don't take kindly to intruders. This haunted house is not for the faint of heart; care to take the tour?

- **Toxic Zombia Jam:** These vile and radioactive Zombies have been summoned to take over Halloween... soul by soul. Taking place in an eerie outdoor setting, this 'must-see' show features special effects and pyrotechnics as back drop to the singing and dancing that is sure to wow audiences. Toxic Zombia Jam takes place in Gotham City at the Gothic Arena nightly. (Family-friendly content, but costumes, special effects and scary, loud music may frighten small children.)

- **Ghost Walkers:** At dusk,

the theme park thrills to Halloween chills as the property transforms to a truly haunted playground for ghosts, ghouls, phantoms, spirits and monsters. Guests must beware as they travel the hallow paths from attraction to attraction... one will never know who or what may be lurking in the midst.

- **Fright Fest Halloween Theater:** Held at the Crazy Horse Saloon, this Halloween movie series will delight and entertain guests of all ages, who can take in a classic movie while they enjoy dinner or a snack.

- **Frightmares:** Mummies, Deadies, Boils and Ghouls. Step right up to this truly Halloween themed variety show. Everyone is sure to recognize the themed songs – sung with a bit of a 'twist' – and all are sure to

'howl' at the show's hilarious jokes, special effects and exceptional grand magical illusion. How do they do that Frightmares takes place in the Grand Theater nightly.

- **Scary Show** – What do you get when you mix horror movies with comedy and laughs? Scary Show – the 13th. Watch this comedic troupe poke fun at some of the most notorious horror movies to hit the big screen. Show takes place in the Western Stunt Show Theater in Coyote Creek nightly.

- **Disco Inferno:** The dancing demons are back with a vengeance in this revamped "red-hot" show. Making the underworld look like a devilish good time, Disco Inferno will have guests dancing in the aisles and singing along to songs they know and love. Disco Inferno takes place in the WB Theater nightly.

Parents will love watching their children trick or treat (or twick or tweat as Tweety would like to say) in a safe and exciting environment in Looney Tunes Movie Town – renamed for Halloween as Looney Tunes Spooky Town.

- **The Pumpkin Patch:** Find everyone's favorite Looney Tunes characters dressed in their Halloween costumes in the park's own Pumpkin Patch. Kodak photographers stand ready to take one-of-a-kind

Halloween photos of the whole family along-side the park's most loveable characters. (Children under 54 inches can opt to wear their Halloween costumes to the park as well.)

- **Monster Mash Bash:** Rock out with Frankenstein and Friends as they perform in this monstrously fun childrens show. This rocking performance features creepy characters that make Halloween fun instead of frightening as they sing and dance to 'spooky' renditions of classic pop songs. Monster Mash Bash takes place on the Spooky Town Stage daily.

- **Not-So-Scary Kiddie Hayride:** Mom and Dad are not nearly cool enough for this ride specifically designed with pint-sized Halloweeners in mind. Twist and turn through a scaled-down hayride themed exclusively (this is the 'NOT-SO-SCARY' part) for small ghouls and goblins. The Kiddie Hayride is next to the Trick or Treat Trail inside Looney Tunes Movie Town.

Fright Fest operating hours are Saturdays and Sundays, Oct. 22 and 23; and Oct. 29 and 30 from 1 to 10 p.m. Bonus night Friday, Oct. 26 from 5 to 10 p.m. All Fright Fest attractions are free with park admission.

Visit www.sixflags.com for more information or to purchase tickets.

Spookily Clad Pets Will Participate in Contest



Courtesy **PETCO**

Scary Shih Tzus, creepy Cocker Spaniels and other frightening four-legged critters dressed in their best Halloween costumes are invited to PETCO's annual Howl-O-Ween costume contest at 2 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 27.

This hair-raising celebration will take place in all

PETCO locations nationwide. Participants will receive a goody bag full of Halloween-themed treats from a treat bar and a certificate of participation. Participation in the event, co-sponsored by Greenies, Four Paws and Avoderm, is free.

Each store winner will receive a \$15 gift card. Contestants will be judged on creativity, attention to detail

and pet parent involvement. Registration begins at 1:30 p.m.

Children will also have a great time participating in a coloring contest for a chance to win a gift card for their favorite furry friend. Coloring sheets are available now. Winners will be chosen during the Howl-O-Ween event.

Furry Halloween Facts:

- According to the National Retail Federation, more than 7.4 million households plan to dress their pet for Halloween.

- Devils and pumpkins are the top pet costumes.

- The American Pet Products Manufacturers Association estimates that 6 percent of dog owners will purchase their pet a Halloween gift.

Clothing Drive and Run Event Benefits Community

Make a Difference Day is a national day of doing good in the community. To celebrate this day, a clothing drive for new or gently used children's hats, scarves, mittens and gloves is taking place through Oct. 22. Forty-five parks and recreation facilities throughout the county will be host sites, including all community centers.

The culminating event will be a 5K Fun/Run/Walk For The Health Of It on Saturday, Oct. 20, at Watkins Regional Park, 301 Watkins Park Drive, Upper

Marlboro.

Registration begins at 8:30 a.m. and the walk/run begins at 9 a.m. The first 300 to register will receive a commemorative gift.

The event includes demos, skate mobiles, hand dancing and the Positive Pathways Pre-Teens program to help prevent juvenile diabetes. 301-454-1484, TTY-301-454-1493 or log onto www.pgparcs.com.

The program is sponsored by the Points of Light Foundation and USA Weekend Magazine.

Council Postpones Healthcare Session

The Prince George's County Council Community Leadership Institute session, scheduled for Thursday, Oct. 18 has been postponed. A new date has not been set. The session was originally planned to provide information to the public regarding the county's hospital system.

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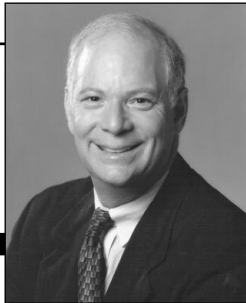
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COMMENTARY

THE PRINCE GEORGE'S POST

A Community Newspaper for Prince George's County

BENJAMIN L. CARDIN U.S. SENATOR



EARTH TALK
Questions & Answers
About Our Environment

Op-Ed

How We Can Ensure Universal Health Care for All Americans

By SEN. BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

We are the richest nation in the world, yet today more than 47 million Americans — 9 million of them children — have no health care coverage. The number of uninsured Americans affects all of us through higher medical costs: higher premiums for insurance, higher hospital costs and higher doctors' bills.

During the course of our lives, we will spend tens of thousands of dollars on health care. This year alone, each American will spend on average \$925 in out-of-pocket costs for health care services. As family members, we will face daunting choices about the care of our children, spouses and elderly relatives.

Now is the time to tackle the problem of the uninsured. I have introduced legislation that would require all Americans to have "qualified health coverage" such as employer-provided health insurance, private health coverage, coverage under public programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) or any other qualified health coverage as defined by their state of residence. This is similar to the requirement by states that all drivers have automobile insurance.

My bill, the Universal Health Coverage Act, S. 1899, directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services to work with the National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC) to develop three low-cost options for individuals

with incomes below 400 percent of the federal poverty level FPL. The FPL is currently defined as approximately \$20,000 a year for a family of four. That standard was selected because the vast majority of working families with incomes above that level have access to employer-based health insurance or the ability to purchase coverage.

Those who fail to enroll for any coverage for a continuous period greater than 60 days would be required to pay an amount equal to the average monthly premium amount for qualified coverage as defined by the state in which they reside. Funds collected by this tax would then be used to automatically enroll them in a state-approved plan.

This legislation reflects my belief in the need for personal responsibility: namely, that those who have the financial ability to afford health insurance must be required to have it. My proposal also maintains the current employer-based system and protects government-sponsored health programs.

We have the most sophisticated health care in the world, but our system lacks adequate access. My proposal builds on our current system, but also creates low-cost insurance options for families who cannot afford to purchase health care. It also requires those who can afford to purchase health care insurance to do so.

The first step we must take to address our nation's health care ills is to deal with the problem of the 47 million uninsured. My proposal provides a common sense approach that will help us move toward that goal.

The Perils of Importation

By JOEL WHITE

Late last spring, Congress came close to legalizing the importation of prescription drugs from abroad. Although the legislation failed, lawmakers are expected to consider a similar measure soon. But despite the assertions of some pro-importation lawmakers who claim that "the only thing endangered" by drug importation "is the incredibly large profits of the drug companies who overprice their medicines in our market," such a bill would actually expose Americans to grave health risks.

As the Food and Drug Administration has declared time and again, it simply cannot guarantee the safety of imported drugs. Indeed, the agency doesn't even have the ability to thoroughly vet drug imports at their current levels.

On a typical day at the John F. Kennedy International Airport Mail Facility, for example, only 500-700 of the roughly 40,000 packages suspected of containing drugs are inspected. And according to a 2004 study, many of the packages that are inspected contain drugs that violate the FDA's safety standards. This includes expired medicines, counterfeit drugs, and insecure packaging.

In other words, thousands of non-FDA-approved drugs are already making their way into the United States. If drug importation is legalized, many more unsafe foreign drugs will wind up in our medicine cabinets.

Meanwhile, even though the volume of imported drugs has more than tripled over the past several years, the number of drug inspectors has only grown by 10 percent, according to a study conducted by CongressDaily last month. So, if Congress formally legalizes drug importation, the already vast gap between drug imports and inspectors would only widen.

Advocates of drug importation dismiss this fear by noting that the legislation under consideration by Congress would only permit Americans to buy drugs from "safe" countries like Canada, France, and the United Kingdom. But the reality is not so simple. First, because the FDA can only inspect a fraction of the foreign packages entering the U.S. each year, it wouldn't be able to guarantee that the drugs Americans import actually came from those countries. It is easy for drug-sellers, especially online pharmacies, to misrepresent where they are based and where the drugs they sell are made.

A few years ago, for instance, the FDA pur-

chased several "FDA-approved" drugs from a website that claimed to be "located in and operated out of Canada." But after receiving the drugs, the agency concluded "that neither the dispensers of the drugs, nor the drugs themselves, were Canadian." Worse, they all "failed most of the [FDA's] purity, potency and dissolution tests."

Further, the World Health Organization estimates that 50 percent of medicines sold through rouge web sites are counterfeit. Counterfeit medicines range from pills containing no active ingredients to those containing highly toxic substances that can harm patients by failing to treat serious conditions and in some cases kill.

Second, it would be nearly impossible to determine if a drug bought from London or Paris was actually manufactured there. This is because of the E.U.'s system of "parallel trade," under which goods, including prescription drugs, can be moved freely and more or less anonymously from one member-state to another. So drugs purchased in Britain could have easily originated in a country with less stringent safety standards, such as Latvia or Cyprus.

For example, a large shipment of fake pharmaceuticals was stopped in the United Kingdom earlier this year, according to a report from the European Union's Tax and Customs Commissioner. The fake drugs had originated in China and passed through the United Arab Emirates before British officials halted their journey to the intended destination, the Bahamas.

Given such complex shipping routes and myriad trade agreements, it would be nearly impossible for America's strained customs service and FDA to accurately track the details of every single drug shipment entering the United States.

Finally, thanks to patient assistance programs, the Medicare drug benefit, and competition in the marketplace, costs have dropped for most consumers, dramatically reducing the need for importation schemes to begin with.

On every front, the health risks posed by drug importation are substantial. Instead of trying to legalize drug importation, Congress should work to clamp down on the unsafe imports that are already making their way here.

Joel White is a visiting senior fellow at the Galen Institute www.galen.org, a non-profit tax and health policy research organization.

Dear EarthTalk:

Are there any efforts underway to lessen the environmental impact—which must be considerable—of all the "18 wheelers" and other large vehicles that are numerous on our highways?

Sadie Strauss,
Madison, WI

According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, although large trucks account for just six percent of total highway miles driven in the U.S., they are responsible for a host of environmental threats. These include over half the soot and a quarter of the smog-causing pollution generated by highway vehicles, six percent of the nation's global warming pollution, and more than a tenth of the country's oil consumption.

A typical diesel-powered 18-wheeler can emit as much nitrogen oxide and fine particulates—key elements in the formation of asthma-inducing smog—as about 150 passenger cars. Although strict limitations on emissions of various pollutants from cars have been in place in the U.S. since the 1970s, trucks and other large transport vehicles have been allowed to emit as much as five times as

much pollution per mile.

But thanks to new regulations put in place by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), new trucks coming off assembly lines in the years immediately ahead promise to be cleaner and greener. Known collectively as the EPA's Heavy-Duty Highway Diesel Rules, the new regulations mandate that trucks manufactured in 2007 or after produce 75-90 percent less nitrogen oxide and 90 percent fewer particulates than earlier models. Of course, with most of the trucks on the road made prior to 2007 and thus exempt from the new regulations, air quality improvements won't happen overnight.

In the meantime, though, the federal government has also instituted new regulations mandating that diesel fuels contain 97 percent less sulfur, another primary component of smog, than previously required. This means that all diesel-powered vehicles in the U.S., new or old, will be polluting less. Regulators hope that the combination of greener trucks and cleaner fuel will eventually bring emissions from large trucks into parity per mile driven with cars and light trucks (SUVs, pickups and mini-

vans).

Beyond making existing truck engines more efficient, new technologies promise to green the trucking industry even more. Biodiesel, a form of diesel fuel derived from renewable plant crops, is coming on strong. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, use of the most common blend, B20 (80 percent regular diesel and 20 percent biodiesel), cuts petroleum use by 19 percent, greenhouse gas emissions by 16 percent and hydrocarbon emissions by 20 percent.

Also, hybrid technologies popularized by the Toyota Prius are starting to show up in trucks. Federal Express is pioneering the use of hybrid technology in trucks by outfitting many of its new delivery trucks accordingly. And several cities now run hybrid diesel-electric buses. Environmental leaders hope such fuel- and emission-saving technologies will trickle down into the private trucking industry as well.

Got an environmental question? Send it to: EarthTalk, c/o E/The Environmental Magazine, P.O. Box 5098, Westport, CT 06881.

The Counseling Corner

Do Not Ignore Teen Depression Problem

A serious, but often overlooked problem for many teens today is depression. It's far more common than most parents realize, and far more serious than most parents want to admit. Teen depression can lead to a variety of problems, with teen suicide at the top of that list.

Unfortunately, deciding whether your teenager is depressed is not an easy task. Most teens are "moody" at times. Teens face hormonal and physical changes, the stress of school and jobs, relationship issues with peers and a variety of other pressures that can leave them stressed and uncommunicative.

But the most serious form of depression, usually described as teenage depressive disorder, is more than just being moody. It's persistent feelings of depression that interfere with the teen's ability to function normally. And it does have certain warning signs:

- Previously good grades slipping
- A dramatic change in attitude
- A radical shift in your child's

identity

- A major change in friends
- Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities
- Withdrawing from friends and family activities and becoming uncommunicative.

While none of these behaviors alone mean your child is suffering from severe depression, when you see one or more it signals a need to pay more attention to what he or she is facing.

Since virtually every teen tends to hold back on sharing too much with a parent, it takes effort to find out what's going on. Ask questions anyhow. Ask about friends, school and current activities. Be persistent. Your child may resent the intrusion, but you have a responsibility to know what's happening in his or her life.

It also helps to be more involved. Try spending more time with your teen. Simple things like family dinners or

encouraging friends to be invited to the house, can help open doors and show your care.

The most important thing is to not ignore any warning signs. Studies report about only one-third of clinically depressed teens are actually diagnosed.

If you suspect problems, talk to adults who know your teen, from teachers to school counselors to sports coaches. If they have also noticed potential problems, seek help. Your school counselor, family physician or local mental health organization can usually offer suggestions on counseling professionals specializing in teen issues.

Teen depression is not just a "phase" that will be outgrown. Ignoring it can leave your teen's life hanging in the balance.

"The Counseling Corner" is provided as a public service by the American Counseling Association, the nation's largest organization of counseling pro-

Letters to the Editor

We Value the Opinions of Our Readers. Send Your Letters to: Editor, Prince George's Post, 15207 Marlboro Pike, Upper Marlboro, MD. 20772

BUSINESS

Practical Money Skills

By Jason Alderman

Helping Military Families Face Financial Challenges

As we prepare to honor our armed forces on Veterans Day, it's appropriate to address the financial challenges often faced by those who defend our country. Far too often, military families face daunting financial difficulties. Here are a few considerations – and precautions – for military families to remember when managing their personal finances and planning for their future:

- **Retirement savings.** In addition to supplying pension benefits to wartime veterans and their surviving families under certain circumstances, the government also provides the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) to military personnel. TSP shares many features of typical 401(k) plans, including tax-deferred savings that can lower taxable income and therefore, yearly income tax.

Although the military TSP generally doesn't match personal contributions as many corporate plans do (except for personnel serving in certain critical specialties who agree to serve on active duty for six years), its annual plan administrative expenses are extremely low – only 0.03 percent. That's considerably lower than fees normally charged for 401(k) plans, which often run 1 percent or more.

Thanks to the 2006 Heroes Earned Retirement Opportunities (HERO) Act, military members serving in combat zones now may contribute to a regular or Roth IRA for additional retirement savings, while at the same time taking advantage of the tax-free status of their combat pay. Previously, federal tax code prohibited service members from doing both at the same time. Retroactive IRA filings dating back to 2004 may be made until May 28, 2009.

- **Mortgages.** Most current and former military personnel are eligible for Veterans Administration-guaranteed home purchase or refinance loans from private lenders. Among their favorable terms: 100 percent financing is available (no down payment required); no private mortgage insurance; loans are assumable by subsequent buyers; and no prepayment penalties.

- **Life insurance.** The government automatically provides a \$400,000 life insurance policy to all military personnel for only \$29 a month. Inexpensive supplemental insurance to cover spouses and/or dependent children is also available.

- **Education.** One of our veterans' most valuable benefits is the education assistance available through the G.I. Bill. Service members and veterans can apply for monthly, tax-free benefits to be used for a variety of degree and certificate programs, apprenticeships or on-the-job programs.

- **Precautions to take.** Military families may be vulnerable to many financial hardships, including: Pay scales are often lower than private-sector jobs; frequent moves to new assignments can result in relocation costs, mortgage or rental deposit expenses, loss of spousal income during transition, etc.; and on-duty reservists potentially face loss of career advancement opportunities and extra costs to maintain their employer's benefits package. Fortunately, numerous governmental and other resources are available to counsel military families on personal finances. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (www.va.gov) provides detailed information on health care benefits, life insurance, pensions, home loans, survivor benefits, education and much more.

Another good resource is www.military.com, which explains in plain language the many benefits available to active duty personnel, reserves, National Guard, retirees, veterans and their families. And Practical Money Skills for Life, a free personal financial management site sponsored by Visa USA, features a comprehensive guide to creating a livable family budget (www.practicalmoneyskills.com/budgeting). As always, consult a financial professional regarding your particular situation. It's critical that our military men and women fully understand the benefits available to them – as well as the financial pitfalls they may be vulnerable to when rushing off to serve their country.

Top 100 Minority Business Enterprises Announced

Award Recognizes Contributions of Women and Minority Entrepreneurs

Courtesy SHARON PINDER

The University of Maryland University College, in conjunction with the Maryland Chamber of Commerce and Maryland Governor's Office of Minority Affairs, will host the Top 100 Minority Business Enterprise Awards Ceremony.

These awards recognize women and minority entrepreneurs who fuel the nation's economy through their innovation, sacrifice and dedication. The awardees are living their dreams and making significant contributions to their clients, professions, industries and communities.

Sharon R. Pinder, president and CEO of The Pinder Group created the awards program.

Three individuals will receive the esteemed title of "Business Legend." This award honors those individuals who have reached a pinnacle in their profession and in serving their community. The winners are: Raymond Haysbert, president of the President's Roundtable and chairman of the Forum Caterers; Dorothy Brunson, entrepreneur; and Joshua Smith, chairman and managing partner of The

Coaching Group, LLC.

This year, an inaugural "Parren J. Mitchell Vanguard for Justice" award, named for the late congressman, will be given to Anthony Robinson, Esq., president of the Minority Business Development Legal Defense Fund, and Harry Alford and Kay DeBow, founders of the National Black Chamber of Commerce.

Candidates were selected based on the following categories: Eligibility, entrepreneurship, professionalism and community contributions. At the time of selection, these candidates were in good standing with the state, District of Columbia or Virginia and conduct business in Maryland.

The selected candidates have introduced a new product, process or service into the market, and contributed to the community through volunteer work.

The awards event will be held from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m., Nov. 8, at the Inn and Conference Center, University of Maryland, University College, 3501 University Boulevard East, Adelphi.

For information, call 301-985-7753.

2007 County Minority Enterprises Winners

The following Prince George's County women and minority enterprises will be recognized for their commitment to the business sector, the economy and their community at a ceremony Nov. 8 in College Park.

- Betty Buck, president, Buck Distributing Company, Inc., Upper Marlboro. Industry: Beer Distributor.
- P.W. "Dee" Carroll, founder and president, CTI Global Solutions, Largo. Industry: Professional Services.
- ArThea E. Dingle, chief executive officer, Precious See, LLC, Largo. Industry: Community Service/Philanthropy and Retail.
- Henry W. Harris, president, Spirit Telecommunications Company, Oxon Hill. Industry: Telecommunications.
- Derrick Hollie, chief executive officer, Global Advertising 1st, Inc., Lanham. Industry: Marketing, Advertising and Public Relations.
- Jacuannette Lewis, chief operating officer, Global Advertising 1st, Inc., Lanham. Industry: Marketing, Advertising and Public Relations.
- Doris E. McMillon, president and chief executive officer, McMillon Communications, Inc., Fort Washington. Industry: Professional Services.
- Gregory Stephen Proctor Jr., chief executive officer and president, G.S. Proctor and Associates, Inc., Upper Marlboro. Industry: Lobbying and Consulting.
- Prathiba Ramadoss, president and chief executive officer, Business Integra, Greenbelt. Industry: Information Technology/Architect Engineering.
- Shelton Rhodes, president and chief executive officer, New Millennium Solutions, dba C2 Education Center, Lanham. Industry: Professional Services.

Loans Available Following Drought Disaster

Small Businesses Located in Maryland are Eligible

Courtesy DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

ANNAPOLIS - Federal disaster loans are available to Maryland small businesses as result of the drought disaster designated for the state. In addition to assistance and financial relief to Maryland farmers, the designation triggered the U.S. Small Business Administration to assist small businesses affected by the same disaster.

"This is welcome news for Maryland small business owners who have been hard-hit by drought conditions this summer," said Gov. Martin O'Malley. "We will continue to work with the Maryland Department of Agriculture and our federal delegation to help our farmers get through this drought."

I also want to thank our federal delegation for all of their continued efforts to help

and support Maryland farmers and small business owners."

Under this designation, SBA's Economic Injury Disaster Loan program is available to farm-related and non-farm-related small business concerns and small agricultural cooperatives that suffered financial losses as a direct result of this disaster. Farmers and ranchers are not eligible to apply to SBA, but nurseries are eligible to apply for economic injury disaster loans for losses caused by drought conditions.

Eligible small businesses may qualify for loans up to \$1.5 million. These loans are available at a 4 percent interest rate with loan terms up to 30 years. SBA determines eligibility for the program based on the size and type of business and its financial resources. Loan amounts and terms are set by

SBA and are based upon each applicant's financial condition. Under this disaster designation, SBA cannot provide loans to agricultural producers.

Interested business owners should contact SBA's Customer Service Center by calling 1-800-659-2955 (1-800-877-8339 for the hearing-impaired) Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. EDT. For more information and downloadable loan applications, visit www.sba.gov/services/disasterassistance. Completed applications should be mailed to: U.S. Small Business Administration, Processing and Disbursement Center, 14925 Kingsport Road, Fort Worth, TX 76155.

Completed loan applications must be returned to SBA no later than April 21, 2008.

Milk Plant in Laurel Given Penalty

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has proposed a \$282,871 penalty against the operators of a milk processing plant in Laurel for failing to report an accidental release of at least 400 pounds of ammonia from the plant's refrigeration system in July 2006.

EPA alleges that Maryland & Virginia Milk Producers Cooperative Association, Inc., which owns and operates the Laurel plant, violated federal requirements for hazardous chemical reporting when it failed to immediately report the ammonia release to local, state and federal emergency management agencies.

The accidental release occurred while conducting maintenance on the plant's refrigeration compressors. The milk cooperative failed to provide follow-up reports to state and local emergency officials. Subsequent to the ammonia release, EPA conducted an

inspection and determined that the facility had not complied with emergency preparedness and community right-to-know requirements, which help employees, local fire, police and emergency responders prepare for and respond to chemical incidents. The milk facility has not submitted a risk management plan to EPA that would have included a hazard assessment, a prevention program and an emergency response program. These reporting and planning requirements are important to protecting public health and the environment.

Maryland & Virginia Milk Producers Cooperative Association Inc., headquartered in Reston, VA, markets milk for its estimated 1,500 dairy farmers throughout the mid-Atlantic and southeast regions of the United States.

The cooperative has the right to a hearing to contest EPA's alleged violations and proposed penalty.

Maryland Communities Set To Fight Crime

Courtesy SENATOR BARBARA MIKULSKI

The Department of Justice has awarded nearly \$13.7 million statewide in Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grants to fight crime in the communities. The grants are used to help communities improve their criminal justice systems and to prevent drug abuse and crime.

Local jurisdictions apply for grants through the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention, and grants are awarded based on

their individual needs.

"This funding is a federal investment in keeping our communities strong and thriving. It will help prevent lost youth and lost opportunity, and keep Marylanders safe in their neighborhoods," said Sen. Barbara Mikulski, who fights every year to keep the program funded.

The nearly \$13.7 million was awarded in 20 grants around the state including:

- Prince George's County Government, \$782,014
- City of Bladensburg, \$14,437
- City of Hyattsville, \$10,993

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Out on the TOWN

'Michael Clayton'

George Clooney Plays a Crafted Lawyer with a Secret Load of Debt

Courtesy **ROGER EBERT**
Chicago Sun-Times

George Clooney brings a slick, ruthless force to the title role of "Michael Clayton," playing a fixer for a powerful law firm. He works in the shadows, cleaning up messes, and he is a realist. He tells clients what they don't want to hear. He shoots down their fantasies of "options." One client complains bitterly that he was told Clayton was a miracle worker. "I'm not a miracle worker," Clayton replies. "I'm a janitor."

Clooney looks as if he stepped into the role from the cover of GQ. It's the right look. Conservative suit, tasteful tie, clean shaven, every hair in place (except when things are going wrong, which is often). Drives a leased Mercedes. Divorced, drives his son to school, has him on Saturdays. Has a hidden side to his life. Looks prosperous, but lost his shirt on a failed restaurant and needs \$75,000 or bad things might happen. Would certainly have \$75,000 if he didn't frequent a high-stakes poker game in a back room in Chinatown. Not much of a personal life.

Clooney works directly with Marty Bach (Sydney Pollack), the head of the law firm; it's one of those Pollack performances that embodies authority, masculinity, intelligence and knowing the score. But one of Bach's top partners has just gone berserk, stripping naked in Milwaukee during a deposition hearing and running through a parking lot in the snow. This is Arthur Edens (Tom Wilkinson), who opens the film with a desperate voiceover justifying himself to Michael.

The video of the deposition is not a pretty sight. One of the people watching it in horror is Karen Crowder, the chief legal executive for one of Marty Bach's most important clients, a corporation being sued for poisonous pollution. Crowder is played by Tilda Swinton, who has been working a lot lately because of her sheer excellence; she has the same sleek grooming as Clayton, the power wardrobe, every hair in place. Thinking of Clooney, Pollack, Wilkinson and Swinton, you realize how much this film benefits from its casting. Switch out those four, and the energy and tension might evaporate.

The central reality of the story is that the corporation is guilty, it is being sued for billions, the law firm knows it is guilty, it is being paid millions to run the defense, and now Arthur Edens holds the smoking gun and it's not quite all he's holding when he runs naked through the parking lot.

Enough of the plot. Naming the film after Michael Clayton is an indication that the story centers on his life, his loyalties, his being just about fed up. Arthur Edens is a treasured friend of his, a bipolar victim who has stopped taking his pills and now glows with reckless zeal and conviction. We meet Clayton's family, we get a sense of the corporate culture he inhabits, we sense how controlling the risks of other people sends him to the poker tables to create and confront his own risks as sort of an antidote.

The legal/business thriller genre has



PHOTO COURTESY WARNER BROTHERS
George Clooney is a carefully tailored lawyer with a secret load of debt and a friend in trouble.

matured in the last 20 years, led by authors like John Grisham and actors like Michael Douglas. It involves high stakes, hidden guilt, desperation to contain information and mighty executives blindsided by gotcha moments. We're invited to be seduced by the designer offices, the clubs, the cars, the clothes, the drinks, the perfect corporate worlds in which sometimes only the rest room provides a safe haven.

I don't know what vast significance "Michael Clayton" has (it involves deadly pollution but isn't a message movie). But I know it is just about perfect as an exercise in the genre. I've seen it twice, and the second time, knowing everything that would happen, I found it just as fascinating because of how well it was all shown happening. It's not about the destination but the journey, and when the stakes become so high that lives and corporations are on the table, it's spellbinding to watch the Clooney and Swinton characters eye to eye, raising each other, both convinced that the other is bluffing.

'The Game Plan' Family Comedy Brings Home Family Values

Courtesy **ROGER EBERT**
Chicago Sun-Times

Back when Walt was alive, the company had a way of putting an unlikely actor like Fred MacMurray or Dean Jones into some silly but original plotline and coming up with pure gold — and these movies still play so well they're among the most highly rented of oldie DVDs.

But the studio has clearly lost that magic touch. If you don't believe this, just take a look at its recent wretched remakes of those two above mentioned family classics. Or, better yet, look at its new family comedy, "The Game Plan."

Now, this thing is harmless enough, and — except for the obligatory flatulence joke — it's clean. But it's a complete by-the-numbers daddy-day-care movie that doesn't have a genuinely enchanting moment or shred of inspiration in its over-long running time.

It stars Dwayne "The

Rock" Johnson as an absurdly egotistic NFL star quarterback whose orderly life is made chaotic by the appearance of an 8-year-old daughter (Madison Pettis) he didn't know he had. Imagine the cliched scenes that ensue from this premise and you'll probably be right.

Things aren't helped by the fact that Pettis, though pretty as a picture, is not a gifted natural actress or even much of a presence. As if trying to compensate for this lack, The Rock wildly overacts and mugs his way through every scene.

At the same time, the film wears its inspirational family values on its sleeve in such an overstated way that it's clear that no one involved really believes them for a minute. It is so contrived and so careful not to offend that it has no real energy.

The movie also is rather shockingly irresponsible. Its catchphrase is "Never say no," actually meaning, I hope,



COURTESY WALT DISNEY PICTURES

"Never say die" or "Never give up." But that higher meaning is not clear, and its lingering message to kids to "Never say no" is a little scary.

RATING: PG for some mild thematic elements

Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, with guitar, struggles with the fact he has a young daughter played by Madison Pettis in "The Game Plan."

Community Health Fair Held Thursday

Courtesy **RASHIDA ALI-MUBARAK**

The University of Maryland's School of Public Health will be hosting its 4th annual Community Health Fair from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m., on Thursday, Oct. 18, at Beltsville Community Center, 3900 Sellman Road in Beltsville.

Each year, more than 400 individuals gather to learn about

maintaining or improving their health status.

In keeping with the long term goals of the Healthy People 2010 health initiatives, our School of Public Health's Department of Public and Community Health has forged an ongoing partnership with the community of Beltsville because chronic diseases are among the leading causes of premature death in the United

States.

It is important to be proactive and maintain a healthy lifestyle especially for the older population. At the community health fair, there will be new and exciting ways to stay fit and feel.

Participants can learn shocking facts about the foods we eat and how small changes in the diet can dramatically improve the way people feel and

perform. Health screenings and tips on how to watch for signs of cancer, heart failure, diabetes and other chronic diseases will be provided.

Flu shots will also be available for a small fee in preparation for the up coming flu season.

Gifts and information will be available. For more information on the fair, call 301-937-6613.

Calendar of Events

October 18 — October 24

FRIDAY, OCT. 19

Talent Show

Prince George's Community College in Largo will host the Student Program Board's Ninth annual Talent Show from 7 to 9 p.m., in Hallam Theatre. Free admission for PGCC students; \$10 general. Advance tickets \$5 from College Life Services, Largo Student Center.

John Henry's Tale

Mad River Theatre works brings a play with music to dramatize the folklore tale of man's first battles with machines at 10:15 a.m. and noon today and 11 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 20, at Public Playhouse, 5445 Landover Road, Cheverly. Henry's legendary strength in laying railroad track through rural West Virginia was tested against the new steam-powered rail driver. This is a tale that resonates in today's techno-driven world. Tickets: \$6 and \$5 groups of 15 or more. 301-277-1710.

SATURDAY, OCT. 20

5K Fun Run/Walk

Participate in a 5K run/walk for Make a Difference Day, from 8:30 a.m. to noon, Watkins Regional Park, 301 Watkins Park Drive, Upper Marlboro. First 300 to register receive a commemorative gift. Fun demos, skate mobile, hand dancing, help prevent juvenile diabetes and more. Pets not permitted. Volunteers, ages 13 and older, are needed to help with this event. 301-454-1484;TTY 301-699-2544.

Stress Workshop for Youth

Learn coping skills for now and later, proper affirmation and communication techniques, calming techniques using music, role-play, group discussion and more from 1 to 3 p.m., at the Upper Marlboro Community Center, 5400 Marlboro Racetrack Road, Upper Marlboro. 301-627-2828.

Family History

Genealogy and family reunion lecturer Nathania Branch Miles will introduce participants to basic genealogical research methods and techniques in the preservation of family history during a workshop from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m., at the Oxon Hill Branch Library, 6200 Oxon Hill Road, Oxon Hill. Registration required. To register, call 301-699-3500, ext. 238.

Autumn Festival

A celebration of autumn will take place from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., today and Oct. 21, at Mount Airy Mansion in Rosaryville State Park. Mansion tours, hay rides, antiques, mountain bike trail rides, Napoleonic Reenactment, art sale, honey products, herbs, Latin American food, salsa music, Dulcimer making, toymaker, handmade wool objects, Boordy Vineyards, organic cheeses from Fire Fly Farms, French pastry shop and more. Free admission. 301-856-9656.

SUNDAY, OCT. 21

Lyric Soprano

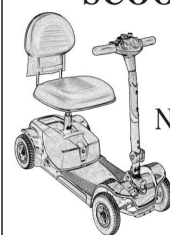
Sligo Church Music Ministry will present a Fall Sunday Concert Series at 4 p.m., with Janice Chandler, lyric soprano, and special guests Rodrick Dixon, Richard Smallwood, Shelton Kilby and Evelyn Simpson-Currenton. Free admission. The event will be held at Sligo Seventh-Day Adventist Church, 7700 Carroll Ave., Takoma Park. 301-270-6777.

TUESDAY, OCT. 23

Poetry in Motion

An open poetry reading will be held from 12:30 to 2 p.m., in the Marlboro Gallery at Prince George's Community College in Largo. Three poems may be recited. Interested individuals must register by today by calling 301-583-5209. After the readings, enjoy a performance by an acclaimed deaf dance, poetry and hip-hop troupe.

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Family

Family, From Page A1

able and profitable in Maryland.”

Villa de Alpacas Farm at Villa de Sales is a 46-acre alpaca farm, which is operated by Mittie M. Forbes Simmons and her daughter Angel Forbes Simmons.

The farm originally produced tobacco and raised horses.

John Dominic Bowling, great, great, great grandfather to current owner Mittie Forbes Simmons, purchased the farm in 1802.

The farm and its Victorian Gothic house, built circa 1870, are listed in the Maryland Historical Trust and the National Register of Historic Places representing the renewed prosperity in the post-Civil War era.



PHOTO COURTESY GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

The owners of Villa de Alpacas Farm in Aquasco was honored for their contribution to agricultural preservation. Featured, from left to right, Gov. Martin O'Malley, Angel Forbes Simmons, Maryland Department of Agriculture Secretary Roger Richardson, Mittie M. Forbes Simmons, Rudy Ambrose Carrico, MDA Deputy Secretary Buddy Hance.

Theft

Theft, From Page A1

they're involved in a car accident. In fact, some drivers who had airbags replaced in their cars, may not be aware that a defective bag may have been put in their vehicle by a shady mechanic who purchased one of the "hot airbags" on the black market. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says without an airbag in your car, the occupant's upper body or head will strike the vehicle's interior during a crash. NHTSA also says airbags reduce the risk of dying in a direct frontal crash by 30 percent.

The caper is an expensive and persistent problem in the Washington metro area, the auto club notes. For example, in Montgomery County, 93 airbags have been stolen so far this year. Last year, more than 100 were snatched from cars in Howard County. "It only takes a matter of seconds, and the thieves can rip out your airbag and be on their way," says Stardard.

Prince George's County police do not have separate statistics for airbag thefts.

However, according to a police spokeswoman, investigators noticed a pattern of airbag thefts in the county about a year ago. An investigation led to the arrest of several suspects who were part of an organized theft ring that

spanned the metropolitan area.

"Nationally, more than 75,000 airbags are stolen every year" in the United States, estimates the Insurance Information Institute. Meanwhile, the National Insurance Crime Bureau says those airbags are valued at more than 50 million dollars. "It's easy money for these crooks, and it doesn't take much to sell the stolen airbags on the black market," Stardard says.

Ruthless auto body and repair shops that use stolen airbags in an elaborate auto insurance scam are part of the growing black market problem too, says AAA Mid-Atlantic. "Because of their portability, airbags can be easily removed and installed as 'new' by unscrupulous collision repair shops," the NICB warns.

"The market for stolen airbags is wide open," says Stardard. "Thieves sell them to salvage yards and car repair mechanics for about \$200 each. Shady mechanics will then replace damaged or deployed airbags in cars that have been in car accidents with the 'hot airbags' instead of new bags from the manufacturer." These airbags are sold to unsuspecting motorists for \$1000 or more, and there's a possibility they won't deploy if the driver is involved in a car accident," the auto club warns.

County

County, From Page A1

principles by fostering economic reinvestment, infrastructure savings, protection of critical environmental areas and resources, and the creation of beautiful, livable communities.

Working with the SHA and with the support of the Federal Highway Administration, the county led a multi-level federal-state-local collaboration to protect watersheds and waterways through the use of low impact development strategies. The county's effort has become a nationally recognized model. It has been the subject of numerous presentations at major conferences and forums related to environmentally responsible development, with Prince George's County serving as host of the first national conference on Low Impact

Development.

NACo's Center for Sustainable Communities primary mission is to provide a forum for county leaders to work with other governments, the private sector, and communities to develop policies and programs that will lead to economic enhancement, environmental stewardship and social well-being — the three pillars of sustainable communities.

The sponsors for the 2007 Center for Sustainable Communities Awards Program include: Bank of America, Freddie Mac, the International Center of Shopping Centers, the Institute for Building Technology and Safety, the National Association of Home Builders, the National Association of Realtors and the Nehemiah Corporation of America.

Jackson

Jackson, From Page A1

2006. "One of the biggest fights is getting the kids here," said Suitland Principal Mark Fossett. Fossett said he worries most about freshmen, because the new pressures of high school make them the most likely to quit. "If we get them through 10th grade, we can get them to graduate," he said. Prince George's County Public Schools spokesman John White concurred. "Ninth grade is the critical year where students have an adjustment to make to high school,"

he said.

Jackson said to reporters after the speech that serious problems face black youth every day, they just do not get the attention of high-profile incidents like the "Jena 6" case. In that case, six black students at Jena (La.) High School were charged with attempted second-degree murder in connection with the beating of a white teen, following the hanging of a noose from a tree near the high school. "The noose is a symbol of a bygone era," Jackson said last week. "But drugs and guns are problems that are happening right now."

Drinking Age

Drinking, From Page A1

said.

The group cited a study by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said that nearly 1,000 lives per year have been saved since 1984 and the number of alcohol-related deaths has been halved since the 1970s, according to information from the National Institutes of Health.

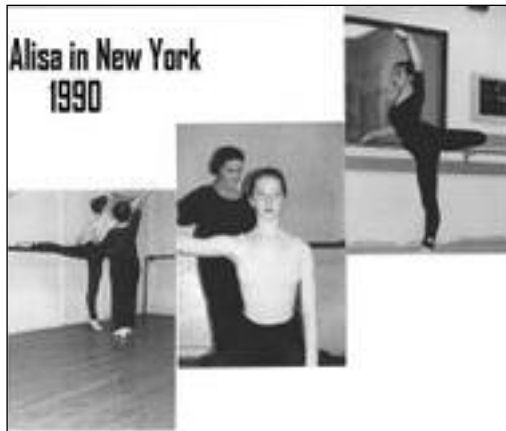
"We have not identified any new information that would change (NTSB's) position," Rosenker said.

Fifty studies have looked at the effectiveness of the 21 law, Rosenker said, and concluded that "lowering the drinking age again will not prevent deaths."

But not everyone agrees with holding the line at 21.

John McCardell, director of Choose Responsibility, an organization that supports lowering the drinking age, said the coalition is only looking at the science it wants to see.

"We can't listen selective-



Alisa Withers was an accomplished ballerina who was preparing for the Washington Ballet's performance of the "Nutcracker."

— Courtesy Jan Withers

ly," McCardell said. "There are 50 studies that say it's working and there are 50 that say it isn't working."

The coalition focused on the lower drinking ages during the 60s, 70s and 80s before the Uniform Drinking Age Act of 1984 was passed.

NHTSA data shows that since the early 1980s the annual number of drunken driving deaths of people under 21 has dropped from more than 5,000 to fewer than 2,000.

"This is a part of our histo-

ry that we need to remember so we don't repeat it," said Glynn Birch, MADD president.

But setting the bar at 21 just forces drinking underground, said McCardell. Minors drink in a "clandestine environment," he said, raising concerns about fatalities occurring off the highway.

"We hear no mention of that," McCardell said. "More than 1,000 lives of 18- to 24-year-olds are lost to alcohol each year off the road ways. Binge drinking by and large

does not happen out in the open."

Adrian Lund, president of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, leaned on the data and accused critics of the 21 law of being naive.

"Highway safety policies need to be grounded in science," said Lund. "Not wishful thinking."

Hurley agreed.

"This is a choice free societies get to make," Hurley said. "The proven age for saving lives is 21."

Their view is garnering public support, the panel said, pointing to a July 2007 Gallup Poll that showed 77 percent of Americans opposing a federal law to lower the drinking age.

The numbers take on a personal meaning for Withers.

"These statistics are more than just numbers to me," Withers said. "Maybe the law didn't save Alisa, but maybe it saved her older sister, or her younger brother."

Battlefield Bear

Battlefield Bear, From Page A1

doesn't mind. In fact, he called it "serendipity," since it brought the company's work attention.

"It was a good joke," he said. "It's OK with us if people joke about the robot's head, as long as they're not criticizing the robot's purpose. We all got a good laugh out of it."

What the robot is made to do is no laughing matter. With \$1.1 million in federal money in hand, Vecna is developing it for military duty: to handle hazardous materials, perform search and rescue missions on battlefields and carry up to 500 pounds for long distances.

Theobald, who works from the company's second location in Cambridge, Mass., said the BEAR works on the principle that rescues are fre-

quently necessary in difficult-to-reach spaces.

"With robots, it's usually like the TV commercial says, 'Wider is better,'" he said. "You can't do that (get into tight spaces) if you're building a robot that needs to go in tight spaces, up stairs and down hallways."

Instead, the company built a prototype that resembles a man, moves hydraulically, and can climb stairs with a series of tank-like tracks while carrying a human being. The current version, No. 6, weighs about 360 pounds, but can carry 500. It is controlled remotely, with cameras and microphones providing perspective on the robot's surroundings.

The price of the final product will depend on what kind of materials and batteries the military decides to use on the final

model, Theobald said. The military version is likely to cost more than \$200,000, while domestic versions for use in things like home health care could cost about \$30,000, according to promotional material.

"The idea is to make them affordable," Theobald said. "If they're not affordable, no one is going to buy them."

Theobald said the company is also enthusiastic about making the BEAR practical for civilian use, especially after watching incidents like a June fire in Charleston, S.C., that killed nine firefighters.

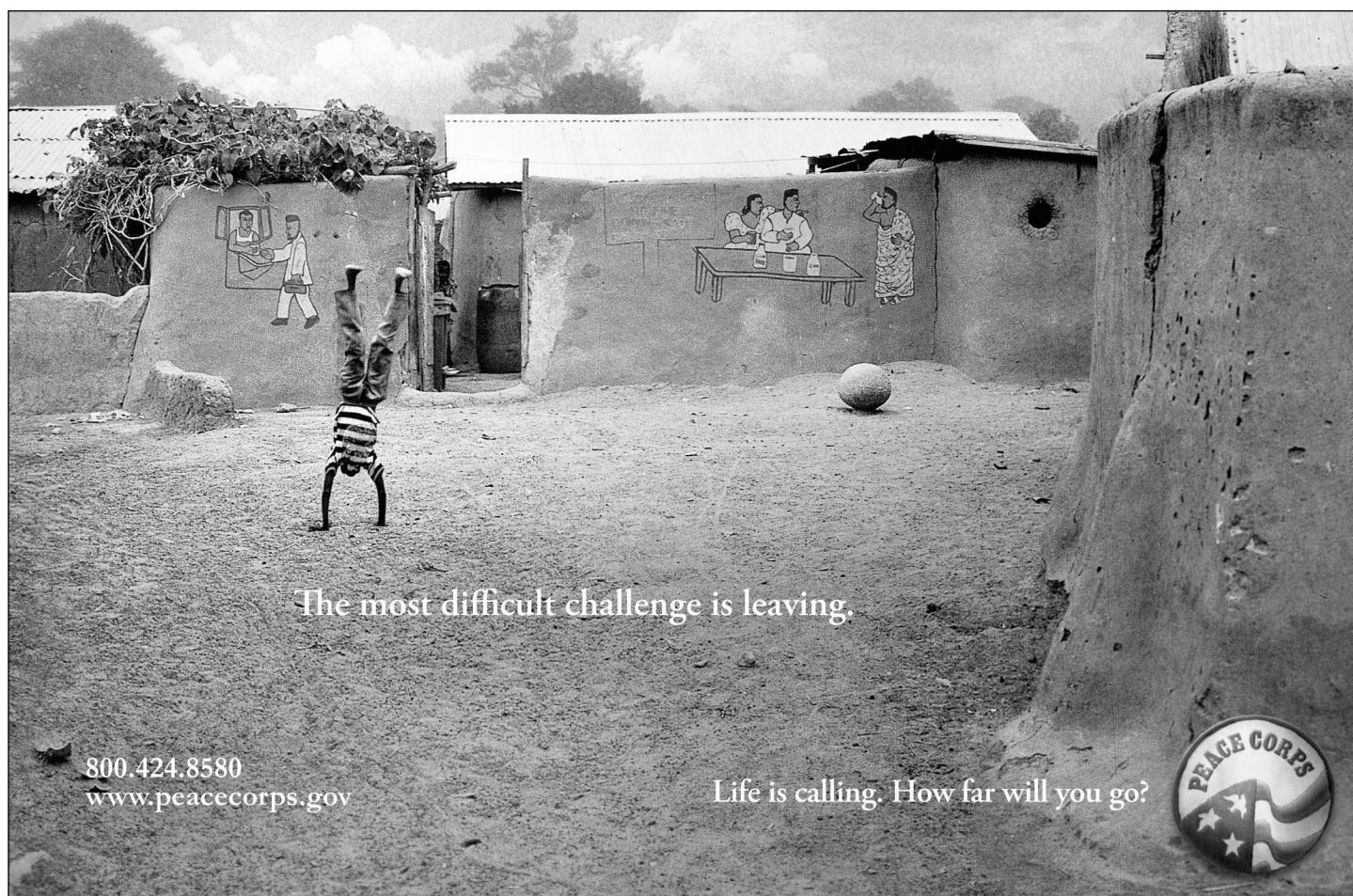
"We've had several tragedies recently where you could argue that firefighters have needlessly died, since they weren't even sure there were people in the buildings," Theobald said. "They're brave,

and that's their job, but our thought is, 'Hey let's send in the robots.'"

As for the bear's ears and head, Theobald said they were added in part for fun to "complete the bear theme," but also because teddy bears are a source of comfort for humans who are suffering a point that has been mocked by some technology bloggers.

"The result looks like something which wandered out of a Japanese superhero anime," said the blog Science Made Cool. "One can easily imagine the underage child of one of the developers teaming up with the BEAR to fight bad guys."

Theobald shrugs at the jokes. "The head can always be changed."



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This program is suitable for families with children ages 7 to 12. 301-839-2400.

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Fax: 301-808-3243

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